

Story #526 (Tape #4, 1974)

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Location: Şembik köyü, Belen
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A Tale of Crepe-Hangers or Pessimists

At one time in the past the canal down there dried up. The reeds that grew in it were burned, and the land that was reclaimed became a field.¹ The villagers cultivated this land, and they left me a small patch on which to grow watermelons. "O Aşık, we have set aside a watermelon patch for you. Why do you not grow some melons on it?"

"Well, I am glad you thought of me," I said. After I had my family plant watermelons there, I asked them, "How many melons did you plant?"

"Enough seeds to grow 180 armfuls of melons," they said

"Very well. Health to your hands! And may Allah make it our kismet to eat them in good health."

A few days later the villagers sent word to me: "Hill the young watermelon shoots." We did what was to be done.

A short while later they said, "Weed your watermelon field!" We did as we were advised. Now we thought that there was not much left to be done. While we were just letting the watermelons grow, a villager asked me, "O Aşık, why not set up a small watch tower in the field, now that these melons have grown so much? They weigh almost three or four kilos apiece already. Wild boars may come and make a mess of them."

¹ The narrator here refers to the Amık Gölü, a swampy area on the Plain of Antakya (Antioch) which had been drained for agricultural use. There are many such "canals" on that vast plain.

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I said, "Well, please take care of them for me. You know that I have no other men in my family. I do not want to be deprived of my bulgur at home while going to Payas² for rice.³ I have my harvesting to do. Should I leave that and let the gypsies eat it for me for the sake of a few bagfuls of watermelons?" Well, by the time we had finished harvesting our wheat, a wild boar had destroyed all of our watermelons.

One day after this I was riding my donkey along the road. When I reached the barber shop of Abdi, I looked and saw Hacı Hamuoğlu Mohamet sitting there.

"Selâmünalevküm," he said.

"Aleykümselâm."

"Aşık, you did not build a tower in your watermelon field, and wild boars have eaten all of your watermelons. What do you have to say about this?

"I wish that you had not said that to me. What a gloomy person you are. Let me tell you a story that I remember.

"Once upon a time there was a gloomy person in a village. A man from our village went to that other village and became a laborer there. It was a village of Adana [Province]. One day the gloomy person, wandering about found the laborer at the place where he was working.

² Section northeast of İskenderun where a steel mill is now located.

³ This is a proverbial expression: Midyat'a pirince giderken evdeki bulgurdan olmak. It means, "While going somewhere for rice, one may lose his bulgur." That is to say, the rice may be better, but the bulgur at home is more certain.

"Selâmunaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm."

"O my fellow villager, how have you been? How are things? What is the news and what are the rumors? What deaths and what survivals?"

"By Allah, my fellow villager, what do you expect?" asked the gloomster. "Those who die pay their debt, and those who survive keep working. Well, your white bitch has died."

"Vah!"⁴ Oh, my poor white bitch! She used to force a rider to get down off his horse. She was such a fine dog! How did she happen to die?"

"Well, her intestines burst while she was eating the carcass of your black camel."

"Do not tell me that the camel has also died!"

"Yes, he died. May you continue to live long!"

"Oh, my black camel! He used to carry such heavy loads! How did he happen to die?"

"Well, your father--may he rest in peace--had promised before his death that he would kiss the sapırtma⁵ tree from Şimşerek Mountain,⁶ and when he was carrying that tree, he fell into a crevasse and was killed."

"Vah! Vah! Vah! Is my father also dead?"

"Yes. May you live long!"

"What caused his death?"

⁴ A common Turkish interjection to express pity or regret.

⁵ Unidentified tree.

⁶ Şimşek is the standard word for lightning.

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"Well, your mother--may she rest in peace--had died a week earlier, and your father could not bear the loss, and so he died."

"You mean our door is now closed off?"⁷

"No, your family owed twenty-five liras to someone, and as there was no one to pay that debt, he came and took the door off the hinges and carried it away. So your door is open."⁸

"To hell with the open door! What good is it to me?"

"When the laborer learned all this bad news, he went to his master and said, 'Pay me off. I am leaving.' After his wages were hurriedly calculated, he rushed to his village. On the way he was met by his white bitch. 'Oh, she is alive--thanks to Allah!' he said. Walking a little farther, he saw his black camel grazing in the pasture. 'Thanks to Allah, he is alive too!' At home he saw that his father was sitting firmly as a bootmaker's log."⁹ 'Many thanks to Allah! My father is alive! Father, where did my mother go?'

"She went to fetch water, son."

"When the laborer heard this, he cursed the gloomster. 'You gloomy son of a pimp! You have deprived me of a livelihood. You destroyed my house.'¹⁰ I fuck your mother!'

⁷ This is one of several metaphors to indicate the end of a family. It is similar to saying that the fire of one's hearth is extinguished.

⁸ This is an obvious play on words.

⁹ The reference is to a person sturdy as a shoemaker's bench, but, in this case, an especially sturdy bench--one made of logs.

¹⁰ This is an expression synonymous with those of footnote 7.

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"'But my name is Gloomy One. Why did you believe all that I told you? Why do you believe all my words? Do you not know me?'"

I turned to Hacı Hamuoğlu and said, "You know, you have made me the same kind of victim as the poor laborer. You do not say, 'Your watermelons have grown. Come and pick them and take them home.' Instead, you say, 'Wild boars have eaten them.'"

But when I left him, I thought it over and decided to make a poem about the incident. Now let us see what Kul Şerif will sing about the|boar. ¹¹

¹¹ The narrator did sing such a song.